

The following evening JD returned alone and soon re-found the bush-cricket, which by now had lost its left hind leg. As he watched, it climbed to the tip of the inflorescence of an unidentified grass, (probably an *Agrostis* species) and began to feed on the spikelets. He managed to take some Flash photographs in which the distinctive yellow mouth parts are clearly visible.

This record, just two years after three males were found on the Isles of Scilly (Hathway et al. *British Wildlife* **15**: 45-46) is further evidence that it has the potential to colonise our south-coastal counties. *Ruspolia* has been expanding its range northwards in France for a number of years. Peter Stallegger (*pers.comm*) has kindly provided us with up to date news of its status in Normandy, where it has been establishing itself since 1999. The first records were from the Perche in the extreme south of the region. In 2002 it was reported for the first time from Manche and in 2004 from Calvados, also for the first time. So far it has not been found in the Cotentin peninsula.— MICHAEL J. SKELTON, 42 Grosvenor Gardens, Bournemouth. BH1 4HH and JOHN DEAN, 10 Queensland Road, Boscombe, Bournemouth BH5 2AB.

The Argent & Sable *Rheumaptera hastata* (L.) (Lep.: Geometridae) feeding on Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale* in southern England

On 27 May and 3 June 2004, DH observed adult Argent & Sable moth *Rheumaptera hastata*, at Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, Somerset, ovipositing on Silver Birch *Betula pendula*. Eggs were laid singly on the underside of young birch leaves near the tip of a branch, up to 130cm above ground on a few small isolated birches bordering a woody edge to a damp field. On 9 June 2004 at the same site I returned to look for more eggs and observed a single female Argent & Sable continuously for 33 minutes as it laid a series of 10 eggs on Bog Myrtle *Myrica gale*. All eggs were laid singly on small (<35cm) plants on young, pale green leaves, at an average height of 11cm (range 4-20cm above ground). To our knowledge, this would appear to be the first occasion that this species has been found breeding on Bog Myrtle in southern England, where it is usually considered to be associated with birch

Returning to the site on 30 June 2004, DH & MP located Argent & Sable larvae among spun leaves on both Silver Birch (three larvae) and Bog Myrtle (12 larvae). In all cases larvae were found individually inside spun leaves on plants exposed to full sunlight. The site is managed as part of a wet grassland restoration project through a mixture of cattle-grazing and burning, resulting in an abundance of small, individual Bog Myrtle plants. No Argent & Sable larvae were found on larger plants growing in denser stands. Additional species noted in spinnings among Bog Myrtle shoots were Powdered Quaker *Orthosia gracilis* and the tortrix *Aphelia viburnana*. However, spinnings formed by Argent & Sable larvae were generally looser in structure than the flat spinnings of the other species, with a spacious 'box-like' central chamber in which the larva was located.

Populations of Argent & Sable in southern England have previously been considered to breed on birch (Skinner, 1984. *The colour identification guide to*

moths of the British Isles. Viking, London). The adults observed at this site were of the large, boldly-marked form referred to as the subspecies *A. hastata hastata*, found throughout England and Wales to southern Scotland (Waring, Townsend & Lewington, 2003. *Field guide to the moths of Great Britain and Ireland*. British Wildlife Publishing). The smaller and more intricately marked northern form *nigrescens* is associated with Bog Myrtle in Scotland, although it is possible it also utilises birch (Skinner, *op. cit.*). These observations suggest that it may be worth examining Bog Myrtle where both the moth and the plant occur together elsewhere in the southern parts of its range. Any further observations of breeding requirements across its range may assist efforts to conserve this UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority species, which has declined across much of its former range.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank English Nature for its continued support of Butterfly Conservation's *Action for Threatened Moths Project* and for access permission to the site.— D. HOARE, Butterfly Conservation, c/o Surrey Wildlife Trust, School Lane, Pirbright, Woking, Surrey GU24 0JN and M. PARSONS, Butterfly Conservation, Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset BH20 5QP.

The colonisation of north-east Scotland by Chamomile Shark *Cucullia chamomillae* (D. & S.) (Lep.: Noctuidae)

The Chamomile Shark was unknown in north-east Scotland before 2003, but in the last three years it has been recorded as resident in all four Watsonian Vice-counties; VC 91 (Kincardineshire), VC 92 (South Aberdeenshire), VC 93 (North Aberdeenshire) and VC 94 (Banffshire). It is now present both at the coast and inland and is virtually ubiquitous in the arable farmland that dominates the northern part of VC 92 and the southern part of VC 93.

Palmer *et al* (*Ent. Rec.* **114**: 145-148 and 2006, in press*) have shown that north-east Scotland is regularly gaining new species from the south and west, but the colonisation by Chamomile Shark stands out as being particularly rapid and spectacular. It is my contention that this has probably been the result of a combination of factors. Recent climatic changes have produced conditions in which the moth can survive and breed and the activities of man, notably through recent agricultural practices, have provided an abundance of the primary foodplant, scentless mayweed *Tripleurospermum indorum*, which has allowed it to spread rapidly and thrive.

Roy Leverton (2005. *Atropos* **26**: 53-54) has already described the early state of our knowledge of this colonisation. To summarise, I recorded a single adult inland from North Aberdeenshire VC 93 near Auchnagatt at O.S. grid reference NJ 9242 in 2003 and again from the same site in 2004, Mark Young also recorded an adult in VC 93 at Oldmeldrum NJ 8227 in 2004 and Roy Leverton found larvae on the Banffshire VC 94 coast near Macduff at NJ 7164 in 2004. Helen Taylor subsequently recorded another adult yet further inland near Fyvie at NJ 8039 in 2005.

With the moth apparently established as resident, a more concerted effort to search for larvae was made by several local lepidopterists in summer 2005 in order to try and

*see pages 23-27 (Editor)